STUDIES ON THE VISUAL MERCHANDISING IN RETAIL STORES IN LUDHIANA

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Abstract: The study aims to find out how and to what extent retail apparel outlets incorporate visual merchandising in retail stores in Ludhiana. The survey method was followed to conduct the study and data were collected through Interview schedule and convenient sampling. Ludhiana was selected as locale of the study. The major findings showed that almost all the stores exhibits creative and interesting displays that incorporate aesthetic principles with basic merchandising techniques to inform and educate potential buyers about the products. Moreover displays are frequently changed to promote new product launches, merchandise assortment, brand names and reflect festive or season themes such as Christmas, New Year, Spring or Summer. All the stores allocate specific budget for their displays. It was further found that almost all the stores employed different elements such as mannequins, lightning, scents, music, layouts, props, fixtures for enhancing their store ambience and attracting customers into the store.

Keywords: Visual merchandising, Window displays, Store layout, Store ambience and Props.

I. INTRODUCTION

Window displays of today has come a long way since the inception of its idea in 1900 by Frank Baum. Today, the focus of spectacularisation of products displayed with elegance and sophistication and less on decoration and landscape. These days a shop window attracts people attention through atmospherics. Scents, music, lightning are a part of store ambience. There were many people whose initiatives and brilliant ideas helped to set eye catching window displays. American retailer Gordon Selfridges, has brought the concept of Visual Merchandising in Department Stores. He was the first to promote Christmas sales with the phrase 'Shopping days, until Christmas. He understood better than anyone the power of a good and exciting display. Many artists like Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauscheberg started their career as Window Dressers in 1950s.Stores started adopting different techniques to make the most of their windows. With time the design aesthetics used in widow displays moved indoors and became part of the overall interior store design. Windows should be designed in a way that allow passing shoppers to view the products from a distance.

A Visual Merchandiser is a professional involved in the promoting activity of goods in retail outlets. He or she implements the merchandising technique effectively using the design of an environment via visual communications from lighting, colors, music and scent stimulating customers' perceptual and emotional response and ultimately to affecting their purchase behavior. Visual merchandising can encompass all aspects of total visual impact of the store and its merchandise.(Garvey 2010) Visual merchandising is all about making the customer feel how the marketer wants them to feel. It takes months of planning before a window is ready for display. It is the merchandise on display that makes money for a store. Visual merchandising is the arrangement of props, fixtures, mannequins and backdrop to influence a customer to enter the store and make a purchase. (Diamond 1993) Merchandise fixtures help to show the merchandise to consumers besides playing a secondary role of aesthetic function. It deals with what product line to be carried to particular shelf space and emphasize on combining visual and other sensory elements to capture attention, awaken the senses through music, scents and provides the customer a wonderful buying experience to achieve sales. It covers all areas from façade of the store to the location of each product inside the store.(Sebastian 2008) Traditionally visual merchandising was always associated with store windows and sales floor display with companies hiring specialists for efficient layout for floor space for optimization of retail space.

A new fashion season presents a fashion business with opportunities to freshen its store through new stock. Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter determine the promotional calendar for developing themes for visual presentation. Spring merchandise often combined with spring flowers creates a refreshing feeling in the store. Fall trims rely on the perception of changing color of nature. The colors of orange with deep reds and yellow influence the trims used.

There are many occasions when the visual presentation of goods changes. Displays changes weeks prior to Valentine day, Independence day, Diwali celebration and Christmas.

The study endeavors to find out the use of visual merchandising tools, techniques and displays employed by these stores. The budget allocated for the stores.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Survey method was adopted to carry out the present study and to collect required information. Questionnaire method and interview schedule were the tools used. The sample size consisted of 50 Shop owners/Managers and 50 visual merchandisers. Ludhiana was selected as the locale of study.

Two types of interview schedules were used to conduct the study. These included a questionnaire for Shop owners/Manager and Visual merchandisers

Interview schedule for shopkeepers/owners:

The interview schedule consisted of questions related to personal profile of the shopkeeper (his name, designation, address of the shop), type of store, basic information about store (as its dimensions, when renovated, layout etc), persons involved in putting up displays, types of displays, tools and techniques for maintaining store ambiance, budget allotted for V.M.

Interview schedule for Visual merchandisers:

This consisted of questions related to personal profile of the visual merchandiser, including his name, educational status, professional qualification and number of persons working in V.M. Team, material, tools used for displays and budget kept aside for V.M.

Pre-testing

After the formation of interview schedule, a trial survey was necessary to gain specific knowledge of the subject and to get an idea of various problems likely to appear during the course of survey. The procedure adopted for pretesting was the same as that for 10% respondents of total sample i.e. 20 respondents including 10 shopkeepers and 10 visual merchandisers were interviewed. On the basis of pre-testing, necessary amendments were made. A few questions were reframed for added clarity, some questions were added to collect more useful information and those which were irrelevant to the study were deleted.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The budget allotted to Visual merchandisers is presented in table1.The result showed that 32% the stores kept up to 40% of budget for Visual merchandising, 28% kept up to 50% budget for V.M. Just 6% of them allotted 10% to Visual merchandising. The figure of allotment of budget reveals that VM is a much recognized technique of selling readymade apparel today.

The table 2 represents type of displays employed. All the 50 shops surveyed employed the Open display, Interior display and Window display method of Visual Merchandising. 96% made use of Theme display, reasonably 84% employed life style display techniques, However Isolated display and project display methods were employed by 50% and 48% of shops respectively.

The table 3 shows the merchandising tools being used for Visual merchandising. All the respondents interviewed used the effect of colors, music, room sprays, and temperature regulation as tools of V.M. Heritage visuals (42 %), flowers (40%) and guitar (22%) were the special tools used by stores to attract customer attention.

The table 4 shows that all the visual merchandisers made use of lightning, mannequins and shelves. A larger percentage of them made use of banners (92 %), gondolas (98%), and slat walls (94%) respectively.These were used to emphasize the merchandise and draw shoppers attention.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study showed that Visual merchandising is the art of presentation, which puts the merchandise in focus. It provides silent service for the customers, helping them in finding their products more easily. It includes everything from display windows to fixtures used for visual presentation. (Dawes 2008) Window display is now a big business. Window displays portray your brand and business, and they attract customers and promote products.

The purpose of visual merchandising is to promote the sale of specific merchandise while reflecting the store's image. As in case of designer store like Tommy Hilfiger, Elle, Parx, Louis Phillip, Benetton which uses lots of props like placing Guitars, fresh flowers, heritage visuals along with their daily display products to attract customer attention. Nike, Reebok, Adidas, U.S polo uses different pictures, sounds and videos along with different racks, mannequins, lawn tennis kit, golf kit to emphasize their sports products. (Clark 2007) Mannequin industry is crucial to visual merchandising. It has undergone drastic changes with the mannequins being realistic before, abstract then, headless later and now switching back to the realistic concept, associated with human touch.

The idea of doing a display is to catch the shoppers attention to make him know about the new item, how it can be used or worn or how it can be accessorized. (Greenland and Mc Goldrick 1994) a good design helps to improve efficiency and encourages people to browse and look into every corner rather than just standing in the store. If consumers can easily satisfy their goals, the feeling of pleasurable shopping experience will be enhanced.

Store displays change from season to season and from one occasion to another. Visual merchandising once an unknown skill is growing popular nowadays as it

educate the customers, creates desire and finally augments the selling process. Visual merchandiser main focus is to display the newest trend and best moving items into the display windows. Virginia Meyer, "Displays attract, compel, and persuade in a subtle fashion. A good presentation can and stop you, get your attention and may be even make you smile"
In the present study, store owners employed different types of displays, tools(color, music, scents, temperature, props, lightning and techniques for enhancing their sales.(Gerad 1957, Wilson 1966, Clynes 1977) show that red is inherently exciting and physically stimulating to human brain. At the other end of the spectrum, blue is found to be much more relaxing in its effect.(Hui, Dube and Chebat 1997) said that enjoyment of the music can produce a more positive mood within the listener.

The changing need for Visual merchandising has reflected by the increase in budget in their displays. Use of different props, fixtures and tools has increased. Visual merchandising is a clever way to exhibit products with the intent to touch the customer's senses, striking the right chords in him and arising in him an emotion to possess the product in display, thus subtly persuading him to make an impulsive purchase.

No serious 21st century retailer can afford to ignore the powerful effects and huge commercial potential of implementing better VM.

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Table 1.Budget allotted to Visual merchandisers

Budget allotted to visual merchandisers	Percentage (%)
0-10	20
10-20	48
20-30	14
30-40	12
40-50	6

Table 2 Type of displays employed throughout the store

Type of displays	Percentage (%)
Open display	100
Theme display	96
Life style display	84
Project display	48
Window display	100
Interior display	100
Isolated display	50

Table 3. Merchandising tools being used for Visual Merchandising

Different Merchandising tools used	Percentage (%) of stores
Colorizing	100
Music	100
Room sprays	100
Maintaining temperature	100
Flowers	40
Heritage Visuals	42
Guitar	22

Table 4 Material used for the Displays

Material used for displays	Percentage (%)
Lightning fixtures	100
Mannequins	100
Banners	92
Shelves	100
Gondolas	98
Grid panels	56
Slat walls	94